

Davis to retire from ECCC after 29 years of service

Special to the Newton Record

East Central Community College biology instructor Ron Davis of Decatur has decided to retire following two years of battling cancer.

Davis, who has taught 19 years at East Central following 10 years in the Meridian Public School system, said the decision to retire was not an easy one, but was largely determined by health factors.

"I really love teaching at East Central, but I feel that I may not be able to carry out the duties of my job at the level that I want to. Also, it has been indicated that I need less exertion and to concentrate more on my health," said Davis, who was diagnosed with metastatic colon cancer in May 2004.

Although he had no symptoms, the cancer had also spread to his liver.

Davis noted that the year-and-a-half of chemotherapy treatments he had taken at the Anderson Cancer Clinic in Meridian "have been rather successful."

"The initial treatments

went better than I thought they would," Davis commented. "However, I have had some setbacks recently and I just need to overcome them."

In reflecting on his 29 years as a classroom instructor, Davis said the highlight has been the "students" who have come his way at East Central.

"Students at this age level are ready to learn and they are interested in learning. They are also interested in understanding the material and are serious about their work. This is a great age group to teach. I feel very fortunate to have been able to meet, teach, and work with the caliber of people we have at East Central," Davis stated.

Davis continued praising his students with the following comment:

"My students continue to be very responsible and considerate people.

That's one of the important things I enjoy about EC students - they are good people. If they have a problem, they don't mind asking for help, and I enjoy helping them. But lately my students have done more to help me since I've been sick. They have really been amazing," Davis stated.

Davis, who has won numerous awards throughout his teaching

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Ron Davis

Biology instructor at ECCC



career, including his selection as ECCC's Academic Instructor of the Year in 1992, Lamplighter in 1994, and HEADWAE (Higher Education Day: Working Toward Academic Excellence) Instructor of the Year in 1994, said he never really thought about teaching as a career while in high school or in college, where he majored in biology.

"When I received my bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1977, Dr. (Clyde) Muse (who was then Superintendent of Schools at Meridian) offered me a teaching position in the Meridian Public School System. I needed a job, so off I went," he recalled.

Davis taught biology at Northwest Junior High and served as science department chairman. He also received "Teacher of the Year" honors.

He was hired at East Central in 1987 to teach biology, anatomy and physiology, and zoology. Davis, who holds a master's degree in education with emphasis in science from Mississippi State University and has completed additional coursework at MSU and USM, said he well remembers his first day at East Central:

"It was scary...but halfway through the day I realized this was the place for me. I really enjoyed my first day and every day since! I really enjoy teach-

ing here!"

In addition to his classroom duties, Davis serves as Chairman of the Science Division and has served as sponsor for Sigma Sigma Mu Tau, an organization for medical students.

Davis helps provide students in the organization with first-hand knowledge about the medical field by taking them on field trips to area hospitals and medical centers. Davis also assists students in preparing them for admission to the various medical schools. Davis also served as legislative representative for the faculty for many years.

Regarding his success at EC, Davis said he has benefited from several "mentors" who provided guidance and other assistance throughout his career. "There have been so many. Dr. Shelby Harris was a real important person to me. I enjoyed working with him as my division chairman and he helped me a lot. Mr. (George) Mason was my cohort when I first came to East Central. He showed me 'the ropes' and taught me a lot.

Mr. (Raymond) McMullan did a great job of 'keeping me straight' and helping with my paper work. These people and others were all very

important to me and played a part in helping me become a better student and teacher," Davis said.

When he is not in the classroom, Davis said his main hobby has been tending to his farm where he raises beef cattle. However, since his illness, he spends most of his leisure time reading.

He also spends time with his family, especially his wife, the former Patti Jefcoat of Forkville, whom he met while both attended East Central. Patti is also a member of the College's faculty, having joined the science division in 1994. Both have enjoyed working together at EC.

The Davises have a son, Matt, who is scheduled to receive a master's degree in mechanical engineering from Mississippi State University in December 2006. He received a bachelor's degree in the same subject in 2005. He is also a 2002 ECCC graduate and member of the College's Hall of Fame.

Although Ron Davis is having to cut short a successful teaching career due to his illness, he can take pride in knowing that many students are leading successful careers because of the instruction they received from him at East Central Community College.

MNF-70

Aaron Ronald Davis**Decatur***Clarion Ledger**4-23-06*

Aaron Ronald Davis, 50, an instructor at East Central Community College for 19 years, died Friday, April 21, 2006, at Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center. Services are 2:30 p.m. today at James F. Webb Funeral Home in Newton with burial in Decatur Cemetery in Decatur.

Mr. Davis was a member of Clarke Venable Baptist Church and a member of the Lions Club. He attended Decatur High School, East Central Junior College, University of Southern Mississippi, and Mississippi State University. He taught at Meridian Public School Systems for 10 years before going to ECCC in Decatur.

Survivors include his wife, Patti Jeffcoat Davis of Decatur; one, Aaron Matthew "Matt" Davis of Decatur; parents, Aaron C. and Ruby Weir Davis of Decatur; two sisters, Denise and her husband Jim Farmer of Decatur, and Denita Smylie of Decatur; brother, Roger and his wife Darlene Davis of Decatur; and several nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers will be Jere Jefcoat, Matt Davis, Allen Davis, Pete Heath Smylie, Jamey Farmer, and Justin Farmer.

The family requests memorials be made to your favorite charity.

Tree Planting and Students' Open Mike
In Honor and Memory of Professor Ron Davis
May 9, 2006, 10 A.M.
Cross Hall, East Central Community College
Decatur, Mississippi

Introduction	Dr. Phil A. Sutphin President, East Central Community College
Prayer	Rev. Mark Vincent Pastor, Clarke-Venable Baptist Church
The Franklin Tree, A Parable of Ron Davis	Dr. M. Talmage Graham Faculty, East Central Community College
"Butter Pecan Ice Cream", a poem	Mr. Dussty Walker Student, East Central Community College
Students' Open Mike	Students of East Central Community College
Planting of the Franklin Tree by Students, Family, and Friends of Ron Davis	Prof. Joe Johnson Director, East Central Community College Arboretum

Professor Aaron Ronald Davis

Born on May 9, 1955 in Decatur, Aaron Ronald Davis graduated from Decatur High School, East Central Junior College, and the University of Southern Mississippi with a Bachelor of Science Degree in biology in 1977. He immediately went to work teaching at Northwest Junior High in Meridian. He continued to work on his Master of Education Degree, receiving it in Science from the Mississippi State University in 1985. He joined the East Central Community College in 1987, teaching biology, anatomy, physiology, and zoology. In 1997, he became Chairman of the Science Department in 1997, serving in that role through the present school year.

Aaron Ronald Davis is remembered especially for his dedication towards his students, and was deeply influential of everyone with whom he had contact. He was declared "Teacher of the Year" while at Northwest Junior High, "Academic Instructor of the Year" at East Central Community College in 1992, "Instructor of the Year" for Higher Education Day in 1994, and awarded a medallion of excellence in teaching by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development at the University of Texas in 1995.

Although he was diagnosed with cancer in May 2004, he continued teaching until just two weeks before passing, on April 21, 2006. He was deeply religious, being a member of Clarke-Venable Baptist Church, although like many scientists, he felt no need to be ostentatious, as Ron Davis' work itself was a continual exposition on the glory of God as expressed in His creation.

"The Country Life is to be preferr'd; for there we see the Works of God; but in Cities little else but the Works of Men: And the one makes a better Subject for our Contemplation than the other."

William Penn, "Some Fruits of Solitude in Reflections and Maxims," 1682.

The Franklin Tree
Franklinia Alatomaha

Appointed Royal Botanist for North America by King George III, Pennsylvania Quaker John Bartram with his son William in 1765 crossed the bottomland of a Georgia river, where they discovered an unusual tree with bright autumn foliage that blooms until frost. Upon sending samples to England, British botanists classified the tree as a member of the *Theaceae* family, including camellias and teas, but the tree was literally in a classification by itself, being a unique genus. The Bartrams, of Philadelphia, ultimately named the tree after their close friend Benjamin Franklin, hence its genus *Franklinia*, and named its species *alatomaha* being a spelling variation of the Altamaha River where it was found. Just how distinctive the tree was became further apparent by William Bartram, when he returned to the site in 1773. After extensive expeditions, he came to realize that the Franklin tree grew nowhere else but the few acres in the river valley where he and his father had discovered it. Worse, the tree was vanishing from the site, with its last definitive observation in 1790, and indubitably became extinct in the early nineteenth century. Although about two centuries since the Franklin tree has passed from the wild, in 1991 the Nature Conservancy established a reserve of over a million acres in the Altamaha River valley to protect its unusual species. The Franklin tree would be remembered only in the descriptions and samples, were it not for the fact that William Bartram in his 1773 expedition saved seeds and saplings, which were then cultivated in their Pennsylvania arboretum, from which all Franklin trees in existence today propagate forth. In 1998, Bartram's Garden undertook an informal census of Franklin tree plantings, identifying 559 in Pennsylvania, but only 58 in Georgia, the tree's native state.

Warm summer sun, shine friendly here;
Warm western wind, blow kindly here;
Green sod above, rest light, rest light.

Robert Richardson, "Annette," 1893.

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit."

Jesus, Matthew 12:33, 1st Century A.D. (King James translation).



Tree Planting
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Tuesday, May 9, 10:00 A.M.
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